



# OFF THE RECORD

## Organise Your Own Livestream Gig

By Robert Blair

in association with **THE SKINNY**



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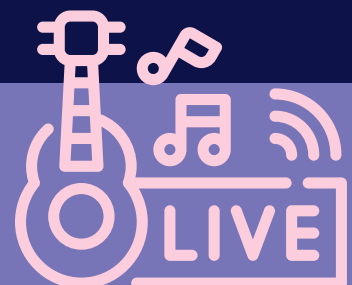
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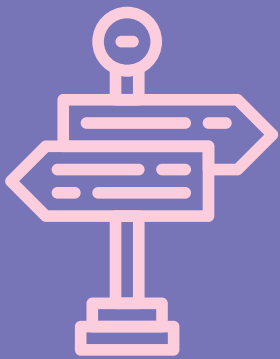
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If you'd have asked us a year ago if we thought there would come a time where we couldn't gather and bask in the invigorating glow of live music, we would have said 'No chance!'. Yet we've reached a point where the arts are impacted by the ongoing effects of the pandemic. For now, our stages are empty and the countryside festivals or inner-city all-dayers that we would normally flock to are experiencing an enforced hibernation.

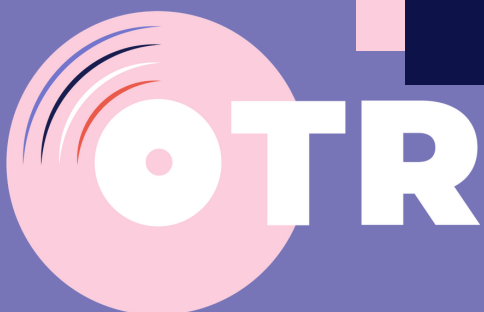
In seeking those live music endorphins, many have taken solace in those who have continued to perform within their new constraints. With the situation developing on a day-to-day basis, musicians are doing what they can to remain active and live streaming has become a crucial tool for aspiring artists. At a time when shows have been postponed, live streams have become a proven method of capitalising on the momentum that you've already built, a way to give your fans a break from the drudgery of current circumstances, or even make your presence felt in the music world for the first time.



There are many variables to consider when creating a successful live stream. With this guide, we aim to help you break down this process with knowledge from some of the nation's best and brightest artists. You will find frank, honest accounts about the redeeming qualities of live-streamed shows and the triumphs that haven been achieved, as well as the pitfalls of adapting to a technological world that's yet to truly establish what a virtual show should look, sound or feel like.



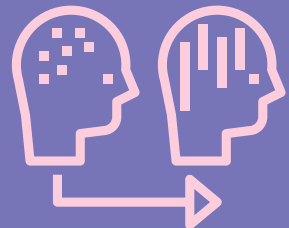
We're here to help you with vital knowledge, inspiration and drive to set up that camera and cast your voice out to a potentially unlimited audience. **A massive thanks to Luke La Volpe, Zoe Graham, Neil McKenzie, Gianluca Bernacchi, Liam Hannah, Chris Blackmore and Katie Doyle (kitti) for their contributions.**



# Adapting to the Times

Even for the biggest optimist, it's safe to say that live streams were no one's first choice. Relieved of the ability to have a face-to-face connection with the audience, artists have had to adapt. For fast-rising Bathgate-based singer-songwriter **Luke La Volpe**, the timing couldn't have been less advantageous.

"Just before lockdown happened, I was in London at a writing session," he recalls. "During that time, I'd put up the ticket link for our King Tut's show. By the time that I'd gotten the train back to Bathgate, it had sold out. Three days later, the world shut down. At the start, I was down and moped for a couple of days but I realised that I had to do something."

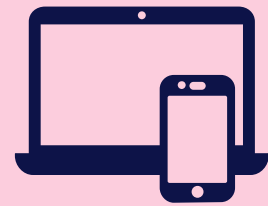


"It's the perfect time for people to listen to music as no one is doing anything or going anywhere," Luke continues. "I wasn't even going to release my EP [Terribly Beautiful, released in May] and then it went to No.1 in Scotland. As live streams go, it was a case of tending to the bit of the garden you can get to."

Glasgow's emerging soul songstress **kitti** was experiencing her own ascent at the start of the year, tasked with retaining the wave of buzz after a sold-out headline show at The Blue Arrow in February. As her live schedule disappeared, she engaged with fans from the comfort of the loft of her parents' house, adorning it with fairy lights and touches that elevated it above your average bedroom set.

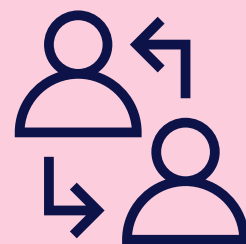


“Having an online presence is important all the time but even more so when you can’t gig. These online shows have been the answer,” **kitti** affirms. “It’s a different way of connecting. You could be singing a song and then ‘hi from Skye’ pops up in the comments. You’re essentially playing a global gig every time, which is a lot of pressure, but I get excited about getting a little bit of that gratification you’d normally acquire from playing live.”

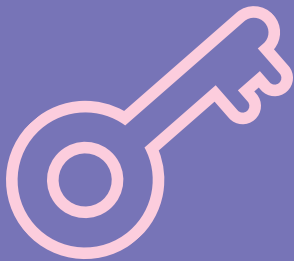


Meanwhile, **Chris Blackmore** – the mastermind behind the folk and roots-centric Holy Smokes Records and their Quaranstream series – was looking to make up for the absence of live shows and the income that accompanies them.

“When lockdown hit and gigs were cancelled, there were various conversations about how to adapt and survive in the meantime,” says Chris. “For a lot of musicians on my roster, it’s their full-time job. If they aren’t playing their own material, they’re in pub bands and performing up to five times a week at the best of times. So with all gigs cancelled, our live streams were a way to provide a platform, get them a wage and stay engaged with the fanbase.”



No matter their motivations, we soon discovered that whatever drove them to set up online shows didn't account for even half the battle. Once they'd pledged to deliver a performance, they had to work out what means of recording would allow their performance to come to life through the unlikely transmitter of a Wi-Fi connection.



## Key Takeaways

- **Recognise the demand for live performances.**
- **Acknowledge the difference between a live stream and a conventional set.**
- **Live streams can retain your connection with an audience, even broaden it.**

# Finding Your Format and Personal Touches


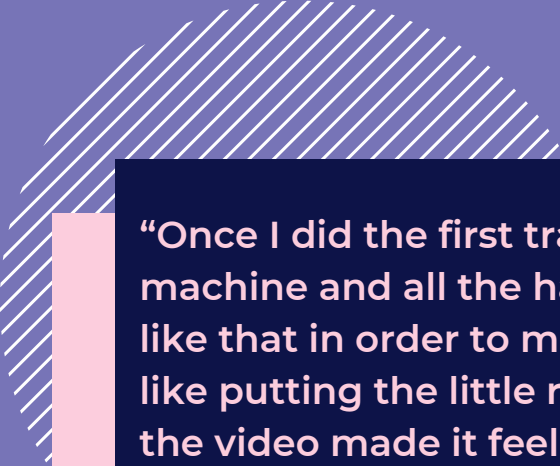


Depending on what you're looking to accomplish, there are many ways that you can approach a live-streamed show. For some, simply picking up a guitar and performing in an intimate fashion can be, as [Luke La Volpe](#) puts it, "a cool way to get people to see what you're actually like". For others, the genre or multi-faceted nature of their music makes this an impossibility.

In the case of acclaimed singer-songwriter [Zoe Graham](#), who was preparing to unveil her *Gradual Move* EP in the months that led up to the world grinding to a halt, she knew that a pre-recorded set would galvanise her fanbase and personal creativity in a way that performing acoustically wouldn't.

"I tried doing a normal live-streamed show on Instagram and I didn't like it," Zoe reveals. "I don't think a lot of people like it, but my friend [Zoe Bestel](#) does brilliant ones every Wednesday. She's got a great setup, takes time to look at the comments and address people, it's well done. Just my terrible eyesight and the inability to see the comments made it a whirlwind, there was too much going on.

"I recorded seven sessions with different camera angles and produced all the tracks. I bit off more than I could chew and stressed myself out but it started to grow legs as it happened," she continues.




“Once I did the first track ‘Gradual Move’ with the drum machine and all the harmonies, I realised that it all had to feel like that in order to make it cohesive. Then, just doing things like putting the little rock faces behind me or a gold border on the video made it feel like something that harks back to the EP. It wasn’t hard to do and it helped to link it all together.”

From hosting her own ZG bingo to the Live(ish) Stream that met the release of the project, Zoe did what she could to blend any further touches into an extension of her own artistic world while unveiling her personality in a way normally reserved for on-stage banter.

Confronting the demands of the digital world on her terms, Zoe’s viewpoint coincides with that of Holy Smokes’ Chris Blackmore, who says: “Social media is awash with people on guitars bashing out tunes over low-quality video. There is potential to make it really interesting though.”

Prone to ushering fans into a realm of dance-infused euphoria, The Vegan Leather’s [Gianluca Bernacchi](#) realises, much like Zoe, that any virtual concert from Paisley’s acclaimed art-pop quartet is diminished by trying to cram themselves into the ill-fitting mould of the stripped-back, one-take set.

“Early on, we realised that we couldn’t perform live as we normally would, particularly as Marie [Collins] and I share the vocal duties. We started with backing tracks on Ableton and then Marie, Matt [McGoldrick, bassist] and I recorded our parts. I made a point that you had to film just one take so that it was as live as possible,” Gian enthuses. “It was a pain with file management, but we just had to be on the ball as it’s the little inflections that don’t match up otherwise.”

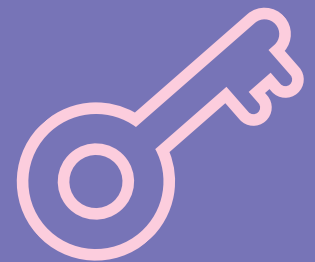




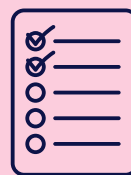
“There have been great live streams on social media but if we’d have done that, it would have been to the detriment of the songs. We wanted to push the envelope. We held a lot of Zoom meetings to map it out as we would with a live set. It allowed us to build it up to be like a headline show.”

Whether you pick up an instrument and perform as Luke or kitti initially did, or construct a set in the vein of Zoe or The Vegan Leather, what’s important is to stack the odds in your favour as an artist. All of this is for nought though if your audience’s enjoyment is hampered by issues with the recording.

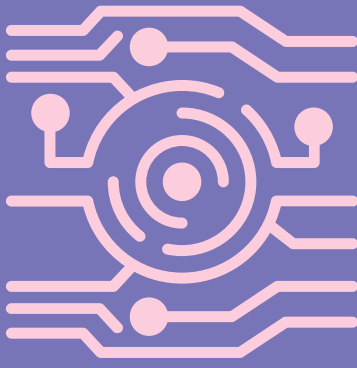
## Key Takeaways



- **Planning is crucial.**



- **Creative presentation goes a long way.**
- **Make the live stream fit your output, not the other way around.**



# Tech Wins and Woes

For a lot of musicians, the lockdown era means that they learn a whole new skillset as they now find themselves taking on the roles of sound engineer, lighting tech and everything in-between.

Everyone has had teething problems of some sort! **kitti's** journey in finding the right platform to suit her took five attempts and the advice of other musicians; **Luke La Volpe** had his Mum walking around in the background and lost almost all 500 viewers on a stream when it cut out mid-set (there were 30 left when it went back up); **Zoe Graham** became an iMovie wiz and discovered not to move the camera too much between takes for continuity, while **Chris Blackmore** implores users to have a dry-run after The Hoojamamas **Stewart Neil** (aka Fat Mantra) had his phone the wrong way round.

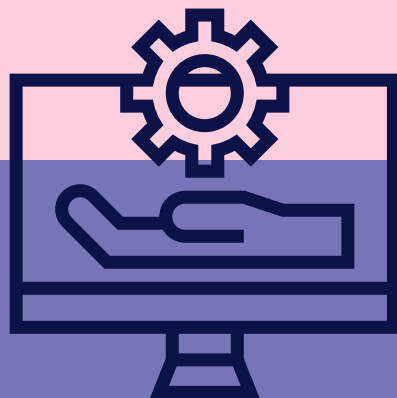
**Neil McKenzie** is revered in Scotland's music scene as a media consultant for Keep It Creative and is also a musician with AI & The Bad Decisions amid a slew of other projects. Here, he offers some practical advice to anyone delving into this evolving marketplace.



**“It’s no longer a strategy to be the best at a single creative skill. Luckily, this has coincided with a time when most people have a full multimedia creative suite in their pocket,” Neil declares. “The video technology on your phone is simple and great. The two biggest improvements you can make are stabilising and lighting your shot. Video cameras work best in good light, so the brighter your room, the better your footage. You can darken it in a video editing app later if needed. It’s not essential, but a cheap phone tripod (£20) and a cheap ring light (£20) could be a great investment.**

**“Audio is more complicated. If recording on your phone, get rid of background noise. Anything beyond that requires investment in an audio interface. If you have a computer, you can buy a microphone and interface for around £100 – essential if you are serious about music. Err on the side of caution with the production, once your tech is in place try and curate what you are doing.”**

**For anyone feeling daunted by what software to invest in and all the specifications, The VL’s Gianluca offers a succinct rundown of all the main brands across different budgets.**





# Audio software

## Free

Audacity - [audacityteam.org](http://audacityteam.org)

A simple multi-track audio recorder. It can be limiting though when it comes to larger sessions.

## Cheap

Reaper - [reaper.fm](http://reaper.fm)

A more advanced DAW (digital audio workstation) with much more flexibility. A licence for the software starts at \$60 (£45) and comes with a 60-day free trial.

## Expensive

Ableton, Logic (Mac only)

Both of these are examples of industry-leading software. Engineered as session multi-trackers and creative tools, too. Look out for student and educational discounts as they can be quite substantial.

Ableton: Intro - £69 /  
Standard - £319 / Suite - £539  
/ Logic Pro X - £199

# Video Editing



iMovie (Apple products only) - Free

Adobe Premier Pro  
[adobe.com](http://adobe.com) - From  
£19.90 per month

## Key Takeaways

- Trial your equipment and connection before going live.
- Find the software that will bring your sound to its peak.
- Tiny improvements and cost-effective equipment could make all the difference.

# Tips and Tricks from those who have Thrived in the Live Streaming Era

## TIPS

“Pre-record your band so that they can just focus on the main performance. On my live streams, I used backing tracks (apart from the vocals) and the piano to help me chill out a bit.” – [kitti](#)

“It’s a buyers’ market at the moment so don’t be afraid to speak to professionals. They might be happy to mix a simple track or edit a simple video for less than they ordinarily would, or even give you some free advice. Less is more – you should aim to put out small regular chunks of performances rather than streaming live for four hours every night.” – [Neil Mckenzie](#)

“There are lots of people doing it really well now and you need to match the competition. Have a look at them and their setups. You need to meet these high standards and also try to do something suited to your music. There are some folk in their mum’s bedroom playing happy hardcore, or pub singers that are getting 2000 viewers at a time, because they’re catering for a specific crowd. Identify your market and hone in on it to draw people in.” – [Chris Blackmore](#)

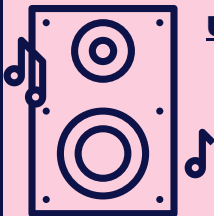
“Look at how creative Twitch streamers have become. A lot of that is gaming but Romeo Taylor’s channel is a good example of what you can do. The platform encourages a lot of back and forth with the audience, plus you have tools like donation boxes. People on Twitch are building careers on the platform just by talking and playing. You can do the same with music. If you’re into your DAWs, you can stream yourself making a tune and chatting.” – [Gianluca Bernacchi](#)

# Accessibility

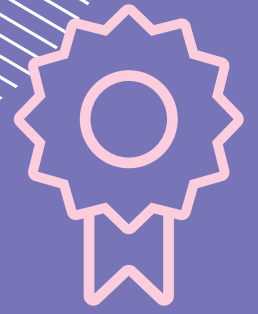
**As the musical live streaming world is still in its infancy, there isn't a great amount of wisdom on-hand about issues surrounding accessibility. However, London-based charity Attitude Is Everything has some useful information. Their mission is to connect deaf and disabled people with live music and event industries to improve access. We encourage anyone delving into performing to consult the AIE Access Guide To Online Music Events to learn about how to make your set as inclusive as possible.**



**<http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/resources/access-guide-online-music-events>**



# Making It Special



Across everyone that contributed their insights to this guide, one shared trait was a persistent desire to do something that went above and beyond the norm. For many of these artists, their ingenuity was ignited through collaborating with others to craft a unique, one-off package. For **kitti**, this willingness to branch out of her comfort zone led to a captivating cover of 'Caledonia' alongside the Cairn String Quartet as part of Stream4Scotland.

"I would never have done that without the restrictions of lockdown," she reveals. "Through that performance, I've been nominated for Best Female Breakthrough at the Nordoff Robbins Scottish Music Awards. It goes to show that good things can come from it."

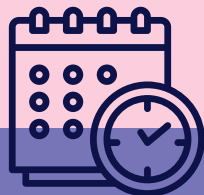


**Luke La Volpe** and his manager devised the Sofathon Singalong in aid of Music Venue Trust and recruited 50 acts to deliver a marathon 24-hour bill. The process led to him becoming a patron of the charity (joining a list including Paul McCartney!) and meeting a lot of bands and artists he might not have spoken to otherwise.

**Gianluca Bernacchi** found himself working alongside acts such as DRIFT, VCO and The Gateway Clash to create Sma'sh Hits, a live-streamed, pre-recorded festival broadcasted by REN TV. Tasked with splicing together all of the sets into a concise package, the process was made easier by the team having a shared set of goals.

“The whole thing with both editions of Sma’sh Hits was that it was all very purposeful,” says Gian. “Marie wanted it to have an ’80s talent show aesthetic which meant that, while the artists had varying sounds, we grounded it all around this idea with a fake audience and Marie as compère. Even if it’s just for yourself, that clear vision really helps.

“It’s all about planning,” he says of pulling the finished product together. “Once you get the artists that you want to work with, you need to have the dates all organised. If you’re the editor, you don’t want to be up until 6am three nights in a row before the broadcast date, you want to give yourself as much time as you can and get things sorted in advance. Everyone benefits when it goes to schedule, so there’s nothing wrong with taking on that management role.”

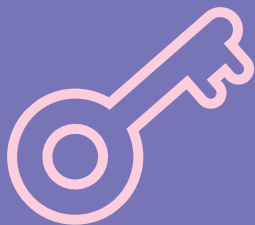


**Liam Hannah** of The Get On Wae It Podcast isn’t a musician but wanted to do something uplifting in honour of a loved one. He launched Sam’s Night as a tribute to his late brother who lost his battle with leukaemia in July of this year. Made up of many of the groups that Sam and Liam shared a love for, the live-streamed show raised over £14,000 for Teenage Cancer Trust.

“It was great raising money for an outstanding charity. It was also important to me to try and capture that gig feel and give some smaller bands a platform while incentivising people of all ages to tune into live music,” Liam says.



“To have over 10,000 folk tune in for the cause was magnificent and it was a proud moment for me. A lot of people have asked me how hard it was to set up,” he continues. “It wasn’t that difficult as the artists helped make things easy. They gave us all their time, even with the world in chaos, and I’m so grateful. A lot of Sam’s favourite bands were on the line-up. We had similar taste and it was amazing to have the likes of The Snuts, Retro Video Club and Lewis Capaldi involved. Scotland’s music scene gets taken for granted, so it was important to represent our talent in the line-up.”



## Key Takeaways

- **Identify a theme and bring it to fruition.**
- **Fundraising through live streaming is more relevant than ever.**
- **Make your audience as broad or specialised as you’d like it to be.**
- **Collaboration can expand your profile and create bonds between artists.**

# Parting Wisdom

When reflecting on the key takeaways from each contributor's interviews, one of the main points of commonality is that they all encourage aspiring performers to 'just go for it'. That said, there is a little more specific guidance we feel it would be remiss not to leave you with.



“Try to capture people’s attention. You don’t have to go out on a limb, just make your background a wee bit nicer (don’t have your washing there!), maybe boost the sound with some harmonies on it afterwards. Do something to set you apart.” – **Zoe Graham**

“Don’t worry! Even throughout Sofathon Singalong, some of the performers on the bill told me that they haven’t even played a gig yet but that SS was one of the best things they’ve ever done. It can be a stepping stone from performing in your bedroom to other people actually seeing you. I also played a lot of songs that I hadn’t released yet and people were telling me how much they liked them and to get them recorded. It’s like being a stand-up comedian, the only way to really test your repertoire is by getting out there and letting people hear it.” – **Luke La Volpe**

“Live music is so important and it gives people so much joy. When you do that live stream, people are grateful to be entertained at this time. It could be easy to be jaded by it but you might make someone’s day and it might encourage them to go to your gig or buy your album when normal life starts back up again.” – **Gianluca Bernacchi**

“Don’t be afraid to chance your arm.” – **Liam Hannah**



# OFF THE RECORD

## Robert Blair, Writer and Editor of Mill Magazine.

Robert Blair is a freelance writer and music journalist from Paisley, Scotland. After beginning his career at Tenement TV, Robert has gone on to work for a litany of world renowned publications including Highsnobiety, Noisey, Dazed, Uproxx, The Big Issue, HotNewHipHop and more. Since July of 2019, he's served as the editor-in-chief of Renfrewshire's Mill Magazine and has enlisted its culture section to promote a diverse array of artists from around the country.

Keep up with Robert on Twitter  
[@rabblair32](https://twitter.com/rabblair32)



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